

ABSTRACT OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An archaeological identification survey was conducted at the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church (44AX161) in Alexandria, Virginia, by Engineering-Science in November 1991. Subsurface archaeological testing was conducted both in the interior of the historic church and in the yard area to the west and south of the church. The study area for the identification survey consisted of the original church lot, which first had been rented by the Colored Baptist Society in 1818, and the adjacent lot to the south which was acquired by the church in 1919. The work around the church foundation identified builder's trenches associated with the construction of the church and with subsequent alterations. Testing in the yard identified a buried cultural deposit datable to the early to mid-19th-century. The deposit covered a builder's trench along the west wall of the old church. The fact that the builder's trench predates the 19th-century deposit along with the date range of artifacts recovered from the trench, allow us to tentatively date the construction of the main block of the church to around the second quarter of the 19th-century. The front 10-foot section of the church and the rear organ chamber were added at a later date, probably in the last decades of the 19th-century. A basement was excavated beneath the standing structure and a concrete floor was poured around the turn of the century. Inspection of the building by an architectural historian identified changes in the height of the floor above the basement after the front 10-foot section had been added. The archaeological investigations also revealed differences in the construction of the church foundation from wall to wall. The foundation walls varied in depth, thickness, and style of brickwork. These variations may represent economic measures as well as the work of different bricklayers.

Both the church and the subsurface deposits were considered to be significant for their information potential. In addition, the church is significant architecturally, and for its association with one of the earliest African-American neighborhoods in Alexandria, known as the "The Bottoms" (Cressey 1985). The church would have been a focal point for this community and an important representation of the community to the wider society. The archaeology revealed unusual architectural features that may shed light on the building techniques used in the construction of the church. This work could be incorporated with wider architectural and historical research into how the construction of the church was funded, who built it (e.g., building societies), as well as the specific building techniques used.

The 19th-century deposit in the yard is significant for the information it may be able to provide on life in "The Bottoms" during the 19th-century. This deposit is probably associated with a family of free African-American tenants, the Beckleys, who occupied the lot next to the church throughout the 19th-century. The Beckley family occupied an economic position near the lowest rank of Alexandria society. There is little historical documentation available on this segment of society. Archaeological investigation has the potential to provide information on aspects such as diet, consumer behavior, and the economic and social strategies pursued by the Beckleys.

Based upon the findings from this identification phase of study, it was recommended that further archaeological work be conducted in the yard area to the south and west of the historic

church and that construction activities around the church foundation and in the area to the north of the historic church and to the east of the modern church be monitored.

Construction monitoring was conducted around the foundations of the historic church on the north, east and west walls in 1992. Excavation of the trench for foundation stabilization on the south side of the building and in certain areas to the west of the building already had occurred prior to the arrival of archaeologists on the site. Grading had occurred along the north wall of the historic church. The foundation wall of the historic church was drawn to scale and photographed in all trenches where it was exposed.

Construction monitoring also occurred in the area to the north of the historic church and to the east of the modern church. One feature of significance was discovered in this location. This was a well. The well was excavated to the depth of construction impact, approximately 6.5 feet. No primary deposits were discovered. The date for the use of the well cannot be established based upon the excavations. Within the fill from the well was a token dated 1934. This would indicate that the final filling of the well occurred sometime after this date.

Archaeological investigation in the yard area to the west of the historic church in 1992 indicated that the 19th-century stratum (Universal Stratum C) was present across the site. The testing in this area was comprised of the excavation of 50 linear feet of trenches. No features associated with this 19th-century occupation layer were discovered.

Based on the archaeological information gathered during construction monitoring, no further archaeological investigations are recommended for the yard area west of the historic church, around the perimeter of the historic church or north of the historic church and east of the modern church.